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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the practice of using cohorts in administrator-preparation programs from conceptual and practical viewpoints. The first three sections describe the current state of affairs of cohort usage; the final section explores the potential of the cohort structure as a means for developing leaders committed to creating communities of learners. The paper begins with an overview of the characteristics of effective groups before examining how certain structures and delivery mechanisms help to develop cohorts into well-functioning groups. Anecdotal evidence suggests that cohorts give students a greater feeling of inclusiveness, promote collaboration, and enhance academic performance. Faculty are provided with opportunities for professional growth and improved student-faculty relationships. Although programs experience increased costs in planning and coordination, they gain from a supportive learning environment and information sharing. Educational systems benefit from increased intradepartmental cooperation and networking among universities and within school districts. The cohort structure can serve as a vehicle for a new leadership paradigm, facilitating the appraisal of personal value systems, appreciation of others' value systems, trust, commitment to group success, and cooperation. (Contains 30 references.) (LMI)

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Exploring Cohorts: Effects on Principal Preparation and Leadership Practice

Margaret Basom, University of Wyoming
Diane Yerkes, California State University, Fresno
Cynthia Norris, University of Houston
Bruce Barnett, University of Northern Colorado

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Abstract: The practice of using cohorts with students in educational leadership preparation programs is examined from conceptual and practical viewpoints. Based on the conceptual and empirical literature of effective groups, the well-functioning cohort is envisoned as allowing participants to develop a common purpose, to have ample opportunities for social interaction, and to engage in activities that promote both individual growth and collective development. Possible impacts of cohorts on students, faculty, programs, and educational systems are discussed. The paper concludes with an exploration of the potential of cohort use for developing transformational school leaders.

Exploring Cohorts: Effects on Principal Preparation and Leadership Practice

Across the landscape of educational administration, the cohort has emerged as a fashionable delivery structure for preparation programs. And yet, the cohort concept is not new to education. As early as the 1940s, cohorts were part of preparation programs committed to reform. Influenced by such early initiatives as the Cooperative Program in Educational Administration and the Culbertson report, "Preparing Educational Leaders in the Seventies," the cohort structure began to flourish in the 1960s (Achilles, 1994).

These early attempts with cohorts were positioned within a broader societal climate characterized by a reactive, authoritarian view of management. School administrators were typically recognized as the single leaders of their schools or districts. Maintaining the status quo was the order of the day. Therefore, those educational administration preparation programs that incorporated cohorts in order to encourage a cooperative and collegial culture were directly challenging the trend toward rationality, order, and control. Given the prevailing view of school administration during that era, it is not surprising that many of the earliest efforts to create cohorts were not sustained.

During the 1980s the cohort concept was revived in response to renewed cries for the reform of educational administration preparation programs. For example, as a direct response to these calls for reform, university programs affiliated with the Danforth Foundation's Preparation Program for School Principals have prepared students using a cohort arrangement (Milstein and Associates, 1993; Yerkes, Norris, Basom, and Barnett, 1994). Although these programs were not specifically required to use cohorts (Cordeiro, Krueger, Parks, Restine, and Wilson, 1993), this structure provided university faculty with a convenient mechanism for selecting students and delivering a coherent, integrated curriculum (Weise, 1992). Increasingly, other preparation programs throughout the country have begun to adopt the cohort model for admitting and preparing their students.

Will today's preparation programs follow the path of earlier attempts to use cohorts such that this arrangement becomes a passing trend? There is good reason to believe they may not. A different societal context exists today in schools--one characterized by shared leadership, communities of learners, and

visionary leadership. School leaders immersed in this culture must be facilitators, transformers, and catalysts of change. Therefore, successful leadership preparation programs will need to provide future generations of leaders with the skills needed to meet the challenges for creating collaborative, collegial learning environments. We contend that the cohort can facilitate the accomplishment of these aims. Besides the obvious collegial benefits of cohorts, there may well be unclaimed potential for developing the leadership so crucially needed in today's and tomorrow's schools.

This paper is written with these considerations in mind. The first three sections of the paper describe the current state of affairs of cohort useage; the final section is devoted to exploring the untapped potential of cohorts as a means for developing leaders committed to creating communities of learners. The paper begins with an overview of the characteristics of effective groups before examining how certain structures and delivery mechanisms help to develop cohorts into well-functioning groups. The impact of cohorts on students, faculty, programs, and educational systems is explored next. Finally, the paper concludes by arguing that the processes used in a cohort delivery model are an untapped resource for transferring learning from a preparation program into practice.

What is a Group?

As a backdrop for understanding how successful cohorts operate, the factors that characterize a well-functioning group must be considered. Webster defines a group as a "number of individuals assembled together or having a common interest." The term has been further defined to mean two or more interdependent individuals who influence each other through their social interaction (Forsyth, 1990). In short, a group is two or more individuals who interact, are interdependent, share common norms, and pursue individual as well as group goals (Johnson and Johnson, 1987). When comparing various definitions, one quickly comes to the same conclusion as Forsyth (1990) who states that "interdependence is the hallmark of a group" (p. 9). Positive interdependence among group members promotes interaction which results in high emotional involvement in learning (Johnson and Johnson, 1987).

Therefore, to truly understand groups, the qualities of interdependence must be understood. A review of the literature on group development suggests that interdependence results when groups members: (1) have a common purpose, (2) influence each other through social interactions, and (3) are allowed to pursue individual and group learning opportunities (Brilhart and Galanes, 1992; Forsyth, 1990; Johnson and Johnson, 1987; Napier and Gershenfeld, 1985; Zander, 1982). In order to better understand how interdependence develops in groups, these three characteristics will be described before examining their importance in the development of cohorts.

Common Purpose

Groups form for a variety of reasons. They become cohesive to the extent that their purpose is clarified and acted upon. Clarity of purpose is achieved whenever group members clearly understand how the group will attain its goals (Larson and LaFasto, 1989). Clarity also is enhanced as the group's accomplishments help move participants toward attaining their goals. Questions may be asked of group members to help them clarify their purpose and reach common agreement about their direction such as: (1) Why have we formed? (2) What are we to accomplish? (3) What is the product or outcome we are expected to produce? (4) How will we know when we have met our goal?

A group's purpose can shift as the desires, wishes, and values of those who have a stake in the group change. What must remain constant, however, is that the purpose becomes "a promise among people that they will try to reach a given state of affairs through collaborative efforts" (Zander, 1985, p. 34). When the purpose is clear and has a sense of urgency or importance, the group will have a a greater probability of success or effectiveness (Larson and LaFasto, 1989). Furthermore, participants of effective groups develop a greater sense of purpose when their activities require mutual interactions and interdependence (Zander, 1985).

Social Interaction

Another factor which characterizes an effective group is the cohesiveness of the social interactions among group members. Social interaction is an important component of human beings' genetic makeup (Brilhart and Galanes, 1992). When placed into groups, individuals learn best when they become involved as actively participating and contributing members of the group. Active involvement is particularly important as adults participate in groups

(Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). Group members' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are likely to be influenced by their social interactions.

Meaningful group interaction is typically not accidental, but is cultivated by the group's facilitator. An attentive facilitator creates a learning climate where social interactions among group members is encouraged and cultivated. For example, organizational arrangements (e.g., meeting location, seating arrangements) should permit formal and informal interactions. Similarly, the facilitator should strive to allow group members to feel important and worthwhile, have a sense of belongingness, and be accepted by other group members (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). An authoritarian, dominating tone can stifle interaction, whereas a supportive climate of respect, openness, and acceptance can facilitate quality interaction (Forsyth, 1990). When individuals are provided with a support network where mutual understanding and respect occur, they are more likely to develop increased self-esteem and to become less anxious.

Individual and Group Development

Opportunities for both individual learning and collective group development are essential if group members are to become interdependent (Forsyth, 1990). Not only must the group processes assist each member in realizing his/her potential, but they must also help the group achieve its goals. As groups progress, individual members balance two sets of expectations: (1) the realization of the group's purpose and (2) the achievement and satisfaction of individual personal goals (Johnson and Johnson, 1987). Group members want to influence the activities and topics of discussion, participate in the decision-making process, develop goals, and evaluate outcomes (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). When such activities take place in a climate of mutual support and respect, it allows for a collegial sharing of everyone's talents and helps to ensure the group successfully accomplishes its goals.

How Are Cohorts Developed?

These three characteristics of groups--common purpose, social interactions, individual and group development--are extremely important considerations as faculty prepare cohorts of graduate students who aspire to school leadership positions. Rather than merely being viewed as a convenient structural

arrangement for selecting students and moving them efficiently through their program of studies, the successful cohort takes on many of the features of an effective group. As indicated above, an effective group does not develop accidently, but must be nurtured by a skilled facilitator. In this section, the ways in which educational leadership program faculty can consciously attend to these three features of groups as they strive to develop productive cohorts are explored.

Developing a Common Purpose

Establishing common expectations and purposes for cohort participation can begin prior to the formal leadership preparation process. For instance, during the selection process candidates can be asked their reasons for wanting to join the program; particular attention can be focused on their motivations and aspirations for participating in a cohort. Barnett and Muse (1993) contend that a common reason many students in educational administration programs choose to participate as a cohort is their preference for working collaboratively with other educators to obtain the additional skills and knowledge needed to become successful school leaders. By screening and selecting students who have similar expectations and commitments, program faculty have a better chance of assisting group members in achieving cohesiveness and interdependence.

Once a cohort is identified and initial expectations for participation in the program are clarified, the teaching faculty must assist students in further defining their purpose. Within cohorts in educational leadership preparation programs, several strategies for developing a common purpose are possible. For instance, cohort members might be allowed to set group goals and determine activities which best achieve these goals. Similarly, they may be permitted to determine the criteria for judging their success and to develop course designs which enhance ownership in the group's purpose. In addition, certain decision-making and problem-solving strategies such as individual learning plans, action research projects, case studies, simulations, and contracts or projects with school districts can assist members of the cohort in clarifying their individual and collective interests. In allowing students more ownership in the program, faculty must become less directive and become "guides on the side" rather than "sages on the stage."

Encouraging Social Interactions

In the earliest stages of cohort development, faculty members need to help students define their structure and to help them become better acquainted. Early interactions among students should allow them to share their values, beliefs, and expectations for joining the group. Some program faculty purposely structure initial activities to help stimulate meaningful social interactions. For instance, residential retreats are excellent settings for initiating a preparation program because students are allowed to engage in intense discussions about their values, aspirations, and expectations prior to beginning the formal preparation program. Other less costly and time-consuming activities, such as creating and sharing "life maps" and participating in outdoor adventure/challenge programs, also allow students to develop a strong foundation of trust upon which future social interactions can be built.

Following these initial social interactions where mutual trust and shared commitment are established, the underlying principles of group development can guide the teaching faculty. For instance, the research on group dynamics indicates group members must feel important, have a sense of belongingness, and be accepted for their expertise and contributions. In addition, the emerging literature on adult learning and development is particularly relevant for cohort development. Studies reveal adults learn best when they can direct their own learning, influence the decision-making process, focus on relevant problems of practice, tap their rich experiential background, and build strong relationships and affiliations with their peers. Finally, humanistic psychologists contend groups become more cohesive when participants have the chance to reflect on their accumulating experiences, to evaluate their own learning, and to rely on others in the group for support. By adhering to these principles of group development, faculty encourage cohort members to become *active* participants in their own learning, trusting their own capabilities and depending on one another (not just the instructor) for guidance and assistance.

Besides incorporating the principles of group development, program structures can influence social interactions among cohort members. One important factor is size. Educational leadership cohorts in Danforth-sponsored programs average between 18-20 students (Cordiero et. al., 1993). Most leadership preparation programs prefer to limit the size to no more than 25 participants, which allows students to develop closer relationships with their

peers and faculty to attend to the needs of individual students. A second factor affecting interactions is the overall framework, or model, for delivering the program. In general, three cohort delivery models have emerged:

- In the *closed cohort* model, students admitted to the program take all of their coursework together in a prearranged sequence.
- The *open cohort* model is more flexible since students enroll in a core set of classes together, taking additional coursework to fulfill their personal needs and/or the university's academic requirements.
- The *fluid cohort* is even more flexible; students may join the cohort at different times rather than at a single entry point which takes into consideration students' unique financial and/or personal circumstances.

These models parallel the three types of cohorts identified by Parks (1994) in his review of existing preparation programs: (a) the pure cohort, (b) the mixed cohort, and (c) the course-by-course cohort. Because of the large amounts of time spent together, students in a closed or pure cohort often develop strong personal and professional relationships; however, critics charge this approach is elitist and restrictive because certain students are afforded special learning opportunities not available to students enrolled in the university's other preparation program(s).

Allowing Individual and Group Learning

A host of teaching strategies and approaches facilitate individual learning and group development. Individual growth is nurtured through activities that encourage self-evaluation, self-initiation, self-confidence, and risk taking and experimentation. *Self-evaluation* results when learners keep reflective journals, develop individual learning plans, and prepare portfolios; *self-initiation* is stimulated through the creation of individual learning plans and portfolios; *self-confidence* occurs when learners apply their skills and knowledge during their internship experiences in different field sites and acknowledge their accomplishments, expectations, and frustrations during reflective seminars; and *risk taking and experimentation* are encouraged when learners are permitted to develop individual learning plans, to work collaboratively on group projects, and to establish the working norms for group interaction (e.g., how to deal with confidential issues and disagreements among group members).

Attending to the collective development of the cohort is encouraged using different instructional approaches. As was noted earlier, teambuilding exercises, retreat settings, and outdoor adventure/challenge programs are particularly effective in building an initial foundation for stimulating social interactions and relationships among cohort members. By sharing their "life maps" and individual learning plans, group members gain a better appreciation of the talents and aspirations of their colleagues. Similarly, opportunities for networking and mutual learning occur whenever students create collaborative projects, deliver joint presentations, visit a variety of school and business settings for their internships, and interact with a variety of teaching practitioners (e.g., mentors) who formally instruct and assess their progress. Finally, obtaining student input on course outcomes, curriculum, methods of assessment, and internship placements empowers students and creates collective ownership in the program's outcomes.

What Are the Impacts of Cohorts?

While descriptions of instructional strategies used with cohorts are beginning to surface in the literature (Achilles, 1994; Cordeiro et. al, 1993; Milstein and Associates, 1993), little systematic research has focused on the effects of cohorts. Nevertheless, some cohort facilitators and group members are beginning to report how cohort structures and activities affect them (Barnett and Muse, 1993; Hill, 1992). If it is true that the "deliberate attempt to create cohorts has turned out to be one of the more important elements of the preparation process" (Milstein and Associates, 1993, p. 199), then it is time to investigate how and why cohorts seem to work. Various levels of impact will be examined, including how students, faculty, programs, and educational systems are affected. In addition, certain unintended consequences associated with cohorts will be described as well as possible ways to address these potentially troublesome effects. In most cases, the data reported are anecdotal and speculative, and are not from well-developed research studies.

Impact on Students

Students in cohorts often notice differences from their previous higher education experience regarding the instructional delivery system, the opportunity to influence decision-making processes, and the chance to connect professionally

and personally with a cadre of colleagues (Barnett and Muse, 1993; Yerkes et. al., 1994). In addition, recent investigations have discovered students' sense of inclusiveness is heightened, their opportunities for networking are increased, and their academic performance is positively affected. Each of these effects will be briefly examined.

Inclusiveness. Students who participate in cohorts feel increased belongingness and social bonding as well as less isolation. Direct quotes from students who have participated in cohorts provide strong evidence for the power of inclusiveness:

> It's really difficult for me to express the kind of bonding that went on. The more activities we went through, the stronger it became, because you had the same frame of reference when you were thinking. . . or when you practiced." (Weise, 1992).
>
> "[I can] confide in friends who were willing to listen without making judgements and accepted me as a peer. . . a person with something to offer." (Basom, 1993b).
>
> "I respect [my peers]. I like them, and I share with them in ways that I do not share with any other group. We are close. We are competitive in a caring way. . . We are developing a community of ideas." (Yerkes, 1993).

Besides these anecdotal data, a three-year study using systematic interviews and surveys of students in preparation programs at the University of Central Florida and East Tennessee State University reveals the importance students place on having a support system during their graduate education (Hill, 1992). Respondents describe how the cohort experience develops a feeling of belonging, social bonding, reduced isolation, and membership in an important group, factors which have been found to be particularly important in student retention and positive feelings toward the degree experience (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez, 1988).

Collaboration. This sense of inclusiveness often translates into increased opportunities for collaboration and networking among students. In most programs which incorporate cohorts, students typically study in teams, work together on projects, and prepare joint presentations. In time, they come to share their successes and failures, learning from other members of the cohort about options, opportunities, and other ways of demonstrating leadership. As one student commented, "The variety of student backgrounds, the wealth of expertise

in individual areas, and the lasting relationships are vital factors that cannot be provided in a more traditional program." (Yerkes, 1993). Other students report the cohort experience has taught them the need to get input from a variety of sources before making decisions and the importance of maintaining existing relationships with cohort members and/or forming a group of first-year principals once they are on the job (Barnett, 1990).

Hill's (1992) study also indicates the importance of increased opportunities for networking and collaboration. Students' responses suggest the cohort experience allows them to develop strong affiliations with other cohort members, to learn a variety of perspectives, and to profit from a division of labor. A constant theme is the professional collaboration that results as students gain in-depth knowledge of the schools where their peers work. Students use time within the cohort to discover and utilize their colleagues' unique talents and skills and to appreciate individual differences.

Academic performance. There is some evidence that academic and scholarly performance, professional confidence and expectations, and the ability to reflect are enhanced through cohort participation. Improvements in academic performance are reported in Hill's (1992) study from data gathered after graduation. Findings show students have improved academic performances, greater motivation for doing scholarly work, and high personal expectations. Other benefits include using and valuing systematic reflection and being able to influence the development of the degree program. Research on student achievement in public schools continues to build strong evidence that caring and supportive learning environments encourage students to exceed their initial academic expectations (Weise, 1992). Leadership preparation programs using a cohort model may well be providing this same type of supportive environment needed for the academic success of adults.

Impact on Faculty

Although the emerging literature on cohorts primarilly describes the impact on students, there is some indication faculty also are affected (Barnett and Muse, 1993; Yerkes et. al., 1994). As educational administration faculty consider adopting a cohort approach, significant issues such as course content and sequencing, instructional delivery, relationships between field experiences and coursework, involvement of practitioners in program delivery, entrance requirements, course requirements, and assessment measures need to be addressed. In reviewing these

areas, faculty can begin to operate as their own cohort, growing professionally as new practices and ideas are explored, tested, and revised. Collaboration and sharing, concepts not often seen in higher education, might become the norm, thus providing stronger professional links to colleagues and varied opportunities for professional growth. At the same time, program planning and integrity, content, instructional delivery, and assessment can be strengthened.

Differences in age, experience, educational level, as well as the power associated with assigning grades have a strong effect on the interpersonal relationships between students and faculty. While not all faculty members might welcome a change in their relationships with students, the experience of working with a student cohort usually affects the ways in which faculty and students interact. When faculty and students meet regularly in cohorts, an opportunity exists to interact at a more personal level. By meeting with students in informal and social settings, at conferences, at field sites, in planning meetings, and in seminars, closer student-faculty relationships can result. Such interactions can improve: (1) mentoring and advising students by faculty, (2) faculty members' awareness of students' needs, (3) opportunities for collaborative research and writing, (4) faculty members' understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses when recommending them for future positions, and (5) long-term professional relationships between university professors and school district leaders. Additional advantages for faculty working with cohorts include knowing in advance the size and composition of classes, supervising students in the field placements over a substantial period of time, connecting theory with field-based activities, and collaboratively participating in the selection and advisement of students (Barnett and Muse, 1993).

Impact on Programs

The addition of a cohort structure usually brings increased costs in planning and coordination (e.g., recruiting and selecting of students, monitoring mentors and field sites). Despite the additional responsibilities and time required, there are numerous positive effects on the program. These include structural as well as curricular changes.

Structural changes. Barnett and Muse (1993) note that the formation of cohorts requires certain non-traditional structures and appropriate instructional strategies. These structures impact program development, organization,

instructional delivery, and student assessment. Some of these structural features are highlighted below:

1. Initial program development activities are intended to create a supportive learning environment. Retreats, adventure/challenge programs, intensive summer programs of study, and teambuilding activities are useful strategies for developing a solid foundation for cohort members to build ongoing relationships and social interactions.
2. Reflective seminars require students to thoughtfully examine their development as school leaders. Journals, small group discussions, portfolios, videotapes of their performance, case studies, and their field site experiences serve as the catalysts for individual and collective reflection. Cohort members also can be empowered to plan the activities comprising these reflective seminars.
3. Opportunities to prepare for future leadership positions result when students are allowed to share information about administrative vacancies, develop educational platforms, engage in mock interview sessions, and discuss personnel procedures with district officials.
4. Activities can be developed allowing cohort members to remain involved with one another after they have completed the formal preparation program. Besides sending newsletters to graduates, sponsoring occasional reunion sessions, and surveying graduates, some universities are experimenting with more creative long-term involvement strategies. One university is making a five-year commitment to students, two years of formal preparation and three years of follow-up sessions; other programs are using graduates to formally assess incoming students; and some programs enlist the support of graduates on advisory committees and planning groups.

Curriculum changes. Milstein and Associates (1993) report that cohort development "permits the coordinator to plan for student recruitment and selection and later for placement as interns, in a cyclical and therefore more efficient manner. It also facilitates the purposeful sequencing of courses" (p. 200). The five university programs in their study, all of which employed a cohort model, focus on enriching the field experiences, recruiting actively, and developing "academic experiences that are grounded in reality and presented in an interactive style that is coherent and sequential" (p. 201).

Furthermore, these preparation programs purposely involve practitioners and students in the redesign of the curriculum. Coursework is frequently delivered collaboratively. Internships and field experiences are started earlier in the program, are more comprehensive, and allow numerous opportunities for hands-on experiences. As a result of the continuing involvement of school administrators and district personnel in program planning and delivery, the curriculum is viewed as being more relevant to the needs of today's leaders. An important by-product of this collaborative effort is improved communication and stronger relationships between universities and local school districts.

Impact on Educational Systems

While students, faculty, and leadership preparation programs may be positively affected when a cohort model is utilized, additional benefits can accrue to the larger educational system as well. Positive changes within colleges of education, between universities, and between universities and school districts can occur. The impact of cohorts on each of these components of the educational system will be dealt with separately.

Changes within colleges of education. Cohort development is becoming more prevalent in colleges of education. Not only are numerous educational leadership programs utilizing cohorts, teacher education programs are incorporating this structure as well. In some instances, educational leadership faculty and the teacher education faculty are working jointly with cohorts. For example, at the University of Wyoming, educational leadership faculty assist in the selection of teacher education candidates who are supervised by the cohort of graduate students in the leadership development program (Basom, 1993a). Similarly, at California State University at Fresno, a group comprised of faculty members from educational administration and teacher education and local school district administrators have developed and received funding for a program where intern administrators supervise intern teachers who are enrolled in the university's preparation program. These examples illustrate that the soil of intra-university exchange and collaboration may be ready to be tilled.

Changes between universities. As faculty from Danforth Foundation-supported programs meet with each other, they have become a cohort of their own where information is shared about program delivery and assessment strategies, research initiatives, and dissemination efforts. As faculty have

participated in these professional exchanges, they: (1) develop long-term friendships and professional associations and (2) form networks that "provide essential opportunities for professional dialogue" (Milstein and Associates, 1993, p. 231). In addition, through the use of mini-grant funds provided by the Foundation, faculty from several universities are collaborating on areas of mutual research interest.

Changes within school districts. University faculty tend to work more closely with school districts when incorporating a cohort (Gresso, 1990). Direct evidence of how schools have benefited from the cohort structure is somewhat speculative; however, after studying universities using cohorts, Milstein and Associates (1993) report that "the cohort approach provides a model of how schools can be transformed into adult learning communities" (p. 200). They further suggest that because of their powerful experiences in the cohort, participants "have experienced empowerment as adult learners and are more aware of the need to practice collaborative leadership as school administrators" (p. 200).

Unintended Consequences of Cohorts

Despite the aforementioned positive effects of cohorts, there are certain unintended effects that can arise. Depending on the circumstances, these unintended consequences can inhibit or promote the group's development. The ways in which faculty and students choose to deal with these emerging issues can either ease or exacerbate tensions between them. We begin by describing some of the more-commonly reported tensions that occur with cohorts, followed by possible ways to deal constructively with these effects.

Possible tensions within cohorts. Because cohorts involve changes in student recruitment and student-faculty interactions, many of the unintended consequences directly affect students. For example, students feel greater pressure to produce as a result of being selected by districts to participate in the cohort (Hill, 1992). Because of their visibility, some students experience a heightened sense of responsibility to their districts and to other cohort members. Faculty also notice students' desire to maintain high performance standards and to keep up with the other members of the cohort. In addition, the power of belonging to a select group and having responsibility for shaping the direction of the preparation program can cause faculty to consider students' behavior to be challenging or presumptuous (Hill, 1992). As cohort members

gain confidence, they can be viewed by some faculty members as desiring special attention, especially by those faculty who are not part of the development of the cohort (Barnett and Muse, 1993). Finally, while cohort members feel highly visible at times, non-cohort students frequently feel left out (Hill, 1992) and tensions can arise when cohort and non-cohort students are combined in classes (Barnett and Muse, 1993).

The intensity of the cohort experience can lead faculty and students to engage in different types of social interactions, some of which initially may be uncomfortable. Sensitive personal issues such as serious illnesses, family difficulties, and marital problems can emerge during the cohort experience. Faculty members may be unaccustomed to dealing with these intense issues and may feel unqualified to provide the needed support or counseling for students. Similarly, faculty involved in cohorts may find enormous amounts of time being devoted to program development, student advising, and team teaching which may divert them from producing scholarly publications for which they are rewarded. This role conflict can be particularly stressful for untenured faculty who, though they may enjoy developing a cohort program, are not able to adequately meet the university's expectations for promotion and tenure.

Ways to deal with tensions. The vulnerability and elitism felt by cohort students are being eased in some programs by changing the entire preparation program to include only cohorts. If this trend continues, students in cohorts may not be quite as visible which may reduce some of their self-imposed pressure. In institutions where several cohorts are operating simultaneously, these groups are not treated as separate entities since different cohorts meet together for certain certification courses, professional development activities, or social events. Oftentimes, faculty members who were not involved in the original planning of the program are invited to these group activities and events in order to help them feel part of the cohort experience.

The professional or career conflicts experienced by faculty involved in cohorts must also be addressed in a straightforward manner. Because faculty members who spend enormous amounts of time developing cohort programs may be at risk in the university reward system, some universities are beginning to explore ways to adequately recognize and compensate their efforts. One solution to this problem is for universities to re-examine the bureaucratic structures that dictate faculty teaching load, tenure, and promotion. Another approach is to recognize that cohort development must become a collective

commitment, rather than the responsibility of a single individual. Such commitments, however, will be challenged by the mounting financial strains experienced by educational institutions. In this era of financial and programmatic accountability, district officials are reluctant to guarantee paid release time for students to work in field sites. Similarly, university administrators find it difficult to justify reduced courseloads and to provide release time for faculty to develop curriculum and/or to coordinate field site activities. As these pressures chip away at the viability of cohorts, the emerging success of this method of program delivery demands the attention of professional educators. Students, practitioners, and faculty members who have experienced the power of cohorts must continue to provide evidence to decision makers in their respective institutions that this approach is worth expending necessary financial and human resources.

What Does the Future Hold for Cohorts?

The foregoing discussion suggests that employing a cohort model for selecting and preparing educational leaders has tremendous advantages over the traditional approach to leadership preparation. Nevertheless, a final question remains: What potential does the cohort structure have for promoting a new leadership paradigm? Our position is that university faculty have only begun to scratch the surface of the value of cohorts as a leadership development tool. In this final section, the qualities of a new leadership paradigm are examined, concluding with a challenge to those preparing educational leaders to use cohorts more wisely in preparing leaders committed to this new paradigm.

A New Leadership Paradigm

Leadership is a process that begins with understanding one's strengths, limitations, and aspirations. Kouzes and Posner (1987) suggest that leadership is an *artistic process* with the leader serving as the instrument for creation. Artistic skill, or leadership, results from an individual's self-awareness and is expressed in his/her behavior. Self-awareness fosters personal faith--faith in one's personal capabilities, values, and convictions.

A cohort environment has the potential for fostering the art of leadership; however, activities must be purposely designed to allow students to explore their personal pathways to self-awareness. As described earlier, when a cohort

operates as an effective group, students build strong emotional bonds which provide them with the freedom to explore their strengths, limitations, and convictions. The emotional bonding among cohort members that allows personal exploration is best expressed in the words of students who have participated in a cohort:

> "We cleaved together as people will do. We cried together and we laughed."
> "We used each other as a source of support."
> "It was just getting to know one another. What are you all about? What's it like in your school? (Norris, 1993).

Through mutual exchange, individuals are "guided to increased awareness of their unique strengths and become cognizant of areas that might need development" (Norris, 1992, p. 122). A growth process takes place as future leaders, within the safety net provided by a true group, risk revealing their inner thoughts and desires which can be quite affirming.

Besides identifying one's strengths and limitations, self-awareness allows individuals to clarify their personal values and beliefs. These become the cornerstone for expressing the art of leadership. Values and beliefs serve as beacons for conceptualizing future visions and for creating a sense of purpose for organizations. Greenfield (1987) contends "Vision, then results from the exercise of moral imagination. . . . Implicit in the activity of making a judgment is the application of some standard of goodness" (p. 62). Visions, therefore, become the guiding light in the artistry of leadership and emanate from the individual's values. The importance of vision, especially as it relates to leaders, has been summarized by Norris (1992) who states that "The responsibility for moral and ethical leadership, therefore, becomes crucial; purpose and meaning are reflections of a leader's value system. What the leader stands for envelops and directs what he does and ultimately encourages in others" (p. 107).

Cohorts can provide fertile ground for the cultivation of personal values through the exchange of ideas. A clarification of one's own personal platform for leadership can occur as these beliefs are articulated, clarified, and challenged by other cohort members. The development of an educational platform is an extremely useful mechanism for future leaders to reveal their values and convictions (Barnett, 1992; Daresh, 1989). From this self-examination, future leaders consider important issues facing education and schools through the lens of personal attitudes and beliefs which leads them to become more comfortable

in voicing their own visions. It is important to realize that openly examining aspiring leaders' visions, beliefs, and values will only flourish in an environment where trust, risk taking, and open inquiry are valued and encouraged. This positive learning climate in the cohort is essential for self-awarness to be fully realized and appreciated.

While the examination of personal beliefs and values may be an important component of cohorts, such disclosure may not come naturally for many people. Gardner (1981), for example, postulates that most individuals have not fully developed themselves because the circumstances of their lives have not challenged them to do so. The encouragement of and opportunity for personal growth have not been afforded to certain individuals. The cohort can provide this encouragement and opportunity only if the teaching faculty provide the necessary activities and learning climate conducive to personal exploration. If, however, faculty are unwilling or unable to nurture self-development, they are apt to miss a unique opportunity to stretch future leaders' thinking and to help them develop their personal artistry as leaders.

Not only is self-awareness essential to leadership development, but an understanding and appreciation of other peoples' motives, aspirations, and values is also important. As students in a cohesive cohort reveal themselves to one another, an element of trust results which fosters mutual appreciation and respect. Attention moves from an inward focus on self to an outward focus on other people. When future leaders are allowed to experience the diversity and complexity comprised in the group, they become cognizant of others' unique contributions. As a result of this outward focus, they develop the capacity to support, promote, and inspire other people to develop themselves.

Appreciation of others results from a collegial learning environment where future leaders learn to trust each other in the pursuit of purposeful goals. Kouzes and Posner (1987) suggest that "Trust is at the heart of fostering collaboration. Leaders who build trusting relationships with their team feel comfortable with the group. They are willing to consider alternative viewpoints and to utilize other people's expertise and abilities" (p. 148). Although collegiality does seem to result from the cohort experience (Barnett and Muse, 1993; Hill, 1992; Weise, 1992), it should not be viewed as an end unto itself. Collegialty becomes the instrument for cooperation which Barnard (1968) views as the foundation of organizational effectiveness. Such cooperation is exercised to the degree that cohort members are provided opportunities to work

together in the resolution of problems and are encouraged to define their own purposes and goals. According to Tjosvold (1986), "In cooperation, people realize that they are successful when others succeed and are oriented toward aiding each other to perform effectively" (p. 25). Through these cooperative learning experiences, future leaders develop the capacity for problem finding as well as problem solving. As future leaders are allowed to question the relevance of current practice and to consider ways to improve the present educational system, they are practicing their own form of "visioning" as they perfect ways to conceptualize and articulate new images for tomorrow's schools.

As students in cohorts become sensitized to their own and other peoples' beliefs and values, become committed to the group's success, learn how to promote cooperation among group members, and clarify their own visions for organizational success, they are beginning to embrace a new leadership paradigm, namely that of *transformational leadership*. Faculty can provide multiple opportunities for students to examine how or if the cohort has embodied the features of "groupness" identified at the beginning of this paper. Questions may be raised concerning whether or not a common purpose has been developed, the types of social interactions that have evolved, and the degree to which individual and collective development have occurred. Similarly, faculty can help students determine how to translate the cohort experience into their roles as leaders. Emerging issues such as building trust, fostering inclusiveness, and encouraging collaboration and networking can fuel discussions about how to develop these same features in schools. By recognizing and practicing these skills in the cohort, students can consider how to transfer these skills and attitudes into their workplaces as they facilitate the empowerment of other people. In short, the cohort become a "learning laboratory" where students are challenged to build empowered schools. Through the cohort structure, there is ample opportunity to define a new leadership paradigm and to create artists capable of shaping the schools of tomorrow.

A Final Challenge

Utililizing a cohort structure does not ensure a true cohort will develop. Recently, the cohort structure has been renovated from the ashes of the past with a sense of promise. The cohort design is enticing; its novelty signifies progress from earlier versions of cohort use. However, educational leadership

preparation programs may well have embraced the cohort concept without fully appreciating its potential for developing transformational leaders. The time has come for university faculty to return to the drawing board and to re-examine the components and theoretical frameworks that can make the cohort structure an even more powerful mechanism for leadership development. Some of the very concepts described in this paper--group dynamics, adult learning theory, curriculum development, and visionary leadership--can guide faculty in purposely developing a cohort where visionary, transformational leaders are created. By not critically re-examining the way cohorts are formed and developed, faculty risk the chance of repeating past failures to utilize this concept to its fullest extent.

Few delivery structures available to those preparing future school leaders have greater potential than the cohort for fostering a new leadership paradigm. To view cohorts simply as a method of course delivery, as a vehicle for socialization, as a convenient scheduling design, or as the fashionable approach to program delivery is to do the cohort structure a grave injustice. By thoughtfully planning and developing cohorts, faculty can realize the power of this approach and fully reap its rewards. The challenge to do so is now before those educators preparing the next generation of school leaders.

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